

[Fred W. Whetaker]

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Life History

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Rangelore

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Fred W. Whetaker, 70, living a 220 E. Bluff ST., Fort Worth, Tex., was born on his father's farm, located adjacent to Pine Hill, Rusk Co., Tex., Jan. 4, 1868. His father, Howard Whetaker, farmed and raised a few cattle for a livelihood. Fred learned to ride during his childhood. He went to Hill county, at the age of 15, and worked for Moore and Benner on their horse and cattle ranch, which was located close to Mount Calm. He worked for Moore and Bonner three years, then wrangled horses for individual owners during the following 11 years. When he terminated his wrangling career, he engaged in farming for a livelihood until 1930, at which time he retired from active life. His story:

"I was born and reared in the piney woods of East Texas, Jan. 4, 1868. Howard Whetaker was my father's name. He owned a farm and ran a few cattle, as everybody did in those days.

"The cattle were left to take care of themselves. We gave no attention to the critters, except when we needed a beef, or when a buyer or trader came through and we did some trading. Then the various owners would go into the woods and roundup the cattle wanted.

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For instance, assume the buyer wanted 100 head of steers, several owners would round up the number and kind of cattle wanted. Then each owner would cut out his respective brand and count his critters. Each was paid according to the number of critters one had in the herd. C12-2/11/41-Texas

“In the Pine Hill section, we held no general roundup. Each farmer-rancher would roundup the cattle in his territory following the calf crop in the Spring. The calves running with the cows carrying his brand would be branded. Facts are, in the section cattle were a by-product, so to speak, and the settlers took out 1 of the cattle that which came their way.

“There was no one in our section who made drives of herds to market. The cattle disposed of were sold to buyers and traders who came through the country regularly. Hoss traders came often and traded hosses for cattle, so did buyers who gathered herds for the market.

“The farmers never paid out any cash for their hosses in those days, and the settlers always had an ample supply of saddle and work hosses. The hosses were the Texas bronchos and were a trifle small for farm work, but the critter was the toughest animal for its size of any breed of hosses and obtained at small cost. Therefore, the settler could afford to own and work three bronchos to a rig which could be handled by two ordinary work hosses.

“The reason the settlers in the Pine Hill section neglected to give greater attention to their cattle than they did was because the conditions were so they made a good living without depending on cattle.

“When I was a small lad the country supplied an abundance of everything for people to live on. There was wild game in the wood which could be obtained with little effort, for the woods were full of wild turkey, pheasants, grouse, deer, ducks and other edible game. With cattle running by the hundreds, on the unsettled land, we had a sufficient supply of beef. Our pork was raised without cost, except the small amount of time expended to catch and butcher the animal and excepting the trifle amount of feed given occasionally just to

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keep the hogs close to home. 3 “The hogs were bred and raised in the surrounding woods and lived on the 'mass', which kept the animals in excellent flesh. I shall explain what the term 'mass' means, as used by the settlers. When they spoke of mass they referred to the various kinds of nuts and other products of the woods. In those days, in the Pine Hill section, there were many different kinds of nuts. We had the pecan, chestnut and haslenut in abundance. There was also an abundance of herbs and grass. With this variety of food, the hogs would be in top flesh at all times and especially so in the late fall.

“Each farmer had a mark, which was registered, and used to mark his herd of hogs. The place of marking was on the hog's ears. The marks were made by various shaped and number of slits.

“The settlers were unable to do more than guess at the number of hogs carrying his mark. So, you may understand that the settlers of those days were well supplied with pork and at very little cost.. Therefore, in addition to the wild game and beef, we had a large supply of pork, all of which took care of the meat supply.

“Our principal crop was cotton, and corn ranked next. We raised corn for our meal supply and to feed work stock. Also, we raised vegetables for our table and cane for sorghum. The wild honey bees supplied all the honey we could eat, thus sweets did not cost us but very little. We had chickens which found their living in the adjacent woods and fields and supplied us with eggs. A few cows supplied the milk and butter for the family. About the only articles of food bought were a few spices and coffee. 4 “The cotton crop brought in the money necessary for clothes and incidentals. A great part of our clothes were homespun, therefore the cash outlay for clothes was small.

“In the Pine Hill section we did not have the cattle rustling menace, but we did not have to watch our hosses. There were no hoss herds and the stealing was confined to one or two hosses which took place occasionally. Our major menace was the hog rogue. Their

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method was to adopt the rogue's brand. I shall have to explain the brand and why it was the means of stealing hogs.

“Branding of hogs was done by marking the ears. The rogue's brand was made by cutting off both ears. Therefore, a person with the rogue's brand adopted could go on the hog range and cut the ears off of the other fellows hogs and there was no way to detect or prove that the mark had been changed. The rogue's brand was finally prohibited.

“I grew to manhood among hosses, cattle and hogs. I learned to ride at an early age. At the age of 15 years I could ride well as any lad of that age and better than most of them. I was like most boys of those days and my greatest ambition, above all other desires, was to be a cowboy. Similar to the boy's ambition of today of wanting to own an automobile, we wanted to own a saddle hoss, saddle, bridle, chaps and a six-gun. When we were able to be so equipped, we considered that we had reached man's estate.

“At the age of 15 I realized my ambition. I owned a saddle hoss which father gave to me. I had earned a saddle which cost \$25.00. It was not the best, or the cheapest, but one with which I could ride any hoss and do any kind of range work. Saddles which 5 sold above \$25.00 were no better for practical purposes, but were trimmed more stylish. Some fancy saddles sold for more than \$100.00. I bought a \$7.50 pair of chaps. The best chaps sold for about \$10.00. My bridle cost \$5.00. The price of bridles ran from \$2.50 to \$10.00. Father gave me a six-gun and that completed my outfit.

“After I was outfitted, I lit out for some cow camp in the cow country. I went to Hill county and secured a job working for Moore and Bonner. The ranch was located near Mount Calm and consisted of a fenced range of about 1,000 acres. The outfit ran about [700?] head of cattle and 300 head of hosses. The outfit did not deal in the ordinary longhorn cattle or mustang hosses. Their cattle were the Holstein breed and the hosses were the Clydesdale [?] animals. I am certain Moore and Bonner were about the first people to bring

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Holstein cattle to Texas and the Clydesdale hoss was the first herd of that breed in the State.

“Those cattle and hosses were tame critters and did not require much work attending to the herds. To break the hosses for work was a simple job compared to teaching the mustang working manners. The Holstein cattle never gave us any trouble with stomps and herded easily. Of course, the fence took care of the tendency to drift during a bad storm. Therefore, the herd called for only ordinary attention.

“The outfit worked a fence rider, whose duty it was to ride the fence line and watch for defects. He repaired the minor breaks and a repair crew attended to all other fence repair work.

“My duty was to ride the range and watch for cattle which became bogged. There were a good many bog holes, especially during wet weather, on the range. When I found a critter bogged, I would put the loop around its horns and, with the rope fastened to the horn of the saddle, my mount would pull the critter out. I used a hoss that was well trained for the work. It knew how to dig its hoofs into the ground and lay all of its strength into the pull. At times it required the hoss's full pulling ability, and I have enjoyed seeing some mighty great pulling stunts performed by a saddle hoss pulling with the saddle. Occasionally, I would have to call for help and it required two hosses to handle the job.

There were six hands employed on the Moore and Bonner ranch attending to the two herds. We ate our meals in the cook shack and slept in the bunk house. The outfit used no chuck wagon. We were well fed and served a good variety of food, but fresh vegetables were scarce. The vegetables served to us were the canned goods.

“We were not troubled with stampedes, but there was one class of people that took the silver lining out of our cloud. That was the rustler. The outfit had to maintain one rider to stay with the herd at nights to guard against stealing.

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“Moore and Bonner were not bothered to any extent, due to the class of cattle and hosses they ranged. The Clydesdale hoss and the Holstein cattle were too easily traced, at the time, due to the scarcity of the breed in the State during the period. The rustlers went after the bronchos and the longhorn cattle. “At one period of time the thieves were giving the ranchers 7 a great deal of trouble. It seemed that arrests were hard to make and convictions were nearly impossible. Witnesses were afraid to appear against a defendant and the law enforcing officials were unable to make the arrests or were indifferent about it.

“To meet the menace the ranchers organized a vigilance committee. This committee dealt with the situation directly. When a party was suspected of stealing, the committee would try to get positive proof against the party. After obtaining the necessary evidence, a number of the committee would visit the accused. They would take the party to some spot where a suitable tree was located and there a trial would be held.

“An oak tree still stands in the Trinity River bottom northeast of Grandview, which was the scene of many trials and during one two-year period 11 men were hanged from its limbs and many trials held. Some one of the committee acted as judge. The accused would be allowed to state his case and submit evidence. Evidence supporting the charge against the rustler would be submitted. After all the evidence was presented, then arguments would be heard. Each member would be allowed to state his position and when all the arguments were completed the vote would be taken. The verdict would be rendered according to the majority vote.

“If the accused was found guilty and hanging was the verdict, execution took place immediately.

“The hanging was performed by sitting the defendant on a hoss with a loop around his neck and the rope tied to the limb of a tree. When the ties were all made the hoss was driven out from 8 under the man and he would be left hanging.

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“Some of the defendants would be given a chance for their life by being allowed to leave the country. The activities of the committees had the desired effect in Hill county and the rustlers ceased stealing to a great extent.

“The schemes used by the rustlers to change brands were many. The principal method used to change the reading of the brand was by adding to or changing the letter in a brand. To illustrate, we will assume a brand contained the letter 'F'. This letter could be changed to an “E”, by adding a line to the lower part of the “F”. About the smoothest method which ever came to my notice was the use of what they called the “terrapiin” brand. The brand was made in the shape of a terrapin using this brand, it would blot out the original brand and leave in its place a blot the shape of a terrapin, and all other figures would be covered.

“Using the terrapin brand on cattle worked something like the rogues brand did on hogs. It removed all evidence of former marks and was hard to change.

“A scheme was formulated to meet the hoss stealing, which worked very well. A company was organized and registered a 'C' brand on the left jaw. Anyone owning hosses could become a member by paying a small fee and use the C brand. Each hoss was described and the description was recorded with the association. In the event the critter was lost the organization made an effort to locate the animal. When a lost animal was found, the party who had possession would be compelled to prove from whom he obtained the hoss, and by that method the stealing could be traced to the thief. 9 “The organization had a standing reward for locating any C brand critter. The scheme worked so well that anyone buying a hoss with a C on the left jaw was very careful to see a proper bill of sale and know the seller. Also, because of the difficulty rustlers encountered in selling a C brand hoss, they passed up the brand.

“I worked for the Moore and Bonner outfit three years and then took up hoss wrangling for private people as a business.

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"I went to Eastland county and worked all over that section of Texas, also in east Texas. I spent 11 years traveling from one town to another and made a good living doing nothing else but wrangling. I charge 25.00 a head and turned the hoss over to the owner, properly broke to the saddle.

"The mustang could be bought broken or unbroken. Of course, if it was unbroken the price would be less. In the majority of cases the buyer had to spend time to break the supposed broken hoss. The ranchers sold a hoss for a broken animal if it had been ridden two or three times, and the riding may have taken place several weeks prior to the sale. In such condition the critter would be about as tough as one which had never been ridden.

"It was not long after I started my wrangling career till I had a reputation as a top wrangler and was kept busy as I wished to be. I would work in a section till I had finished all the jobs offered and would then move to the next town.

"My system of wrangling hosses was the one followed these days. I would snub the hoss and tie up the left fore leg. That would prevent the animal from rearing. With its leg tied up, I would saddle and mount it. I would then have someone release the leg and the pitching would start.

"There has been programs made in the method employed wrangling hosses. The hoss is made acquainted with its changed condition now. First, it is taught to submit to being tied, next to be led, then next to accept the saddle, and last to be ridden.

"In my days as a wrangler, the system was to teach the animal that man was its master, with force and might, by riding it till the hoss became discouraged and submitted to being ridden and handled. The early day system was hard on both the hoss and wrangler.

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"There were many hosses ruined by the old system of force and might. Some hosses would pitch till they were released. I rode two different hosses that pitched until they overstrained their heart and dropped dead.

"The hoss that pitched till it became exhausted we called a snake-blood. When a wrangler mounts a snake-blood, he takes on a real job to perform. For a good rider, it is not so much a matter of keeping himself from being pitched out of the saddle as it is having the strength to stay with the animal until it quits pitching.

"With each leap the rider is put in a strain, especially his back and legs, because it is necessary to brace the body against the sudden movements of the animal. Also, the jar to the body, when the hoss hits the ground, is wearing.

"I found a way to relieve the strain to some extent. This was by passing a rope under the hoss and fastening each end of it to a stirrup, thus preventing them from swinging outward. By so doing, I could steady my body easier, because the tied stirrups provided a better brace.

"Riding a hoss is just a matter of keeping up with the animal's movements. What I mean, is to swing your body with the movements of the hoss and be braced when a movement stops. One must learn to discern the hoss's movements ahead of the move, by feeling and seeing the animal's muscles tensing just before the move starts. One can tell what kind of a move the hoss is going to make by noting the muscles that are being tensed.

"Hosses have several styles of pitching, but as a rule each hoss follows one general method. The different styles were classed by the wranglers and the principal ones were the following: The 'fence-rowed', 'sun-[percher?]' and straight jumper. The fence-rower jumped to one side and reversed the direction of the next jump. The sun-percher jumped sideways, but made all the jumps in the same direction. The straight jumper jumped and ran straight ahead.

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“Occasionally, a wrangler would get hold of a hoss which was unusual and had a quirk to its movement while in the air. Such a hoss is next to impossible to ride, because a rider can't maintain his balance on a hoss that is wiggling while in the air. The quirk is made by the hoss at the movement it starts its descent after the elevation.

“I have rode some wigglers and some I failed to stay with. I was classed as a top wrangler and could ride any pitching hoss, except a few of the wigglers. There was only one rider that I have ever seen who could master the wiggler. He was a colored fellow 12 named Fred Hickman. He died at Forth Worth, Tex., a few years ago. This colored fellow could meet all the movements any hoss was able to make.

“During the years I worked at hoss wrangling, I worked one Spring roundup in Eastland county. I have forgotten the outfit I worked with, but Fred Hickman worked with the same outfit and I watched him 'ride 'em'.

“The rawhides of the various outfits working in the roundup hunted out every tough hoss in the country for the colored fellow to ride. The boys tried to find a critter he could not stay with, but he 'rode 'em all'.

“While talking about top cowhands, the fellow I shall have to credit with being the best roper was 'Booger Red', who lived in Fort Worth, and took the roping championship in roping contests for a number of years.

“I have no doubt about it being a fact that, among the cowhands of Texas, were some of the best ropers, gun-shots, and riders in the entire world.

“At the conclusion of my wrangling career, I returned to Rusk county and engaged in farming, in which business I continued until a few years ago. Since quitting the farm, I have just been [daubing?] around at odd kinds of business.